



HISTORY WEST™

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September 2024

GENERAL MEETING

The next meeting at Stirling House is on Wednesday 18 September at 6pm when Richard Offen will present a talk on *“Every Comfort and Convenience”*. *A History of the Royal Hotel, Perth*. Refreshments available from 5.30pm; Bookshop open until 6pm.



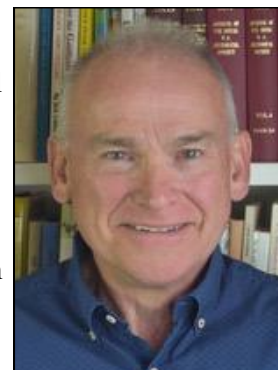
The coming of the railway to Perth in 1881, and the draining of Lake Kingsford, caused an increase in commercial and building activity in the area around Murray and Wellington Streets. As a result, more private buildings appeared, including new and substantial hotels, which could provide quality accommodation, particularly since the opening of the railway.

One of these new hotels was built in 1882 on the corner of William and Wellington Streets. This was Royal Hotel, now the oldest working hotel in the city centre. With only one recent break for refurbishment, the hotel has continuously provided hospitality to both visitors and local residents for over 140 years. Its history has been marked by many events which have led to a reputation that, in some eras at least, has been less than desirable.

The 1882 building is still at the heart of the establishment but has been altered and modernised several times in its history. In this talk, Richard Offen will chart the trials and tribulations of this much-loved Perth hostelry.

After fifteen years teaching, **Richard Offen** spent nearly fifteen years on the staff of the UK National Trust. He migrated to Perth in 2005 to become the inaugural director of Heritage Perth, a post he held until retiring in 2017. During that time he

became a popular speaker and broadcaster, promoting the State's history and heritage. In 'semi-retirement', Richard now spends his time as an author and broadcaster, having written for Pavilion Books *Perth Then and Now*, *Lost Perth* and *A Perth Camera*, and school histories for St Mary's Anglican Girls School and Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School. Richard is also a Councillor on the Heritage Council of WA.



Call for books for the 2025 Giant Second Hand Book Sale



Donate any books you no longer want to a good cause. Bring them to Stirling House or call 9386 3841 to arrange a pick up. All books, except textbooks and encyclopedias, are wanted. Many thanks from us all.

Welcome to new members

Kathy Morgan
and
Trina Glover

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Forthcoming Events — Don't forget to book!

Or ring the office 9386 3841 admin@histwest.org.au

COMMUNITY TALK



Stirling House, 49 Broadway, Nedlands
Wednesday 2 October, 10 for 10.30am
Historical Panoramas

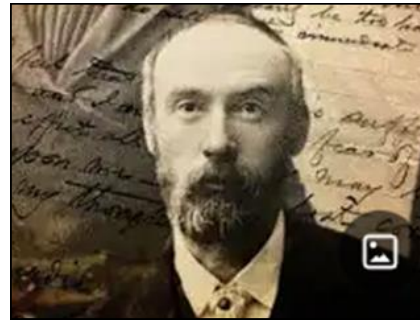
Andrew Woods
Associate Professor from the Curtin
University HIVE

Join us on a wonderful visual journey into Western Australia's past through the lens of wide-angle panoramic images.

[Click here to book](#)
or scan the QR code



HISTORY IN THE CITY



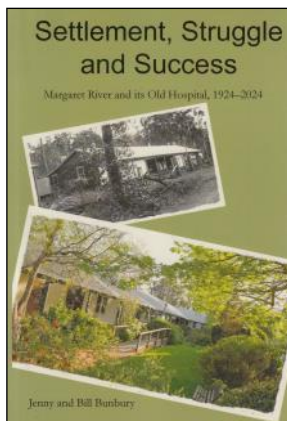
Citiplace Conference Room, Perth Rwy
Station Concourse
Wednesday 4 September, 2pm

C Y O'Connor – Beyond the pipeline and
what happened next
Bill Cutler

We all know about engineer C Y O'Connor's substantial contribution to the development of Western Australia, culminating in delivering vital water supplies to the expanding Eastern Goldfields and farming communities along the way. He also did great work on constructing Fremantle Harbour and developing the railway system.

What is less known is the background to the many pressures O'Connor faced even before the water reached Kalgoorlie. We will explore the events leading to him taking his own life, and the effects on his wife and children. We will also debunk several well-circulated myths!

BOOK LAUNCH



Stirling House, 49 Broadway, Nedlands
Friday 20 September, 5 for 5.30pm

Settlement. Struggle and Success:
Margaret River and its Old Hospital

Jenny & Bill Bunbury

To be launched by President Richard Offen
Do join us for the occasion and speak to the authors
Drinks & nibbles

WRITERS' GROUP



Stirling House 49 Broadway, Nedlands
Monday 11 September, 10.15am-Noon

All members welcome to attend.

If you are attending for the first time, please email

Megan Ewing Convenor —
megan.ewing1@gmail.com

Community Talk

Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories retold



July's talk was given jointly by Kim Scott and Lefki Kailis and concerned the revival of Wirlomin language, stories and songs. The Wirlomin Noongar group (from the Great Southern) works to strengthen Wirlomin language and cultural heritage, first within Wirlomin families themselves, and then to share knowledge with the wider community. For more than a decade the group has recorded Elders, searched

archives and run workshops aimed at reclaiming Wirlomin stories and dialects, supporting Noongar language revival and strengthening Noongar sense of identity and belonging. We heard a fascinating account of the slow process of reclaiming knowledge and disseminating it among younger Wirlomin. Stories can then be told to the wider WA community in a way which empowers Wirlomin story-tellers.

Six work-shopped stories have been published by UWA Press as bi-lingual picture books. For details of the six titles see — <https://www.wirlomin.com.au/stories/books/>

The Society was delighted to sell all its consignment of books on the morning!

One example:

Mamang is the story of a young man who travels the sea in the abdomen of a whale ('mamang'). The whale transports him far west of his home country, where his life is changed forever. *Mamang* is inspired by a story Freddie Winner told the American linguist Gerhardt Laves at Albany in 1931 and was workshopped in community meetings, which included some of Freddie Winner's contemporary family. Told in old Noongar, contemporary Noongar and English, *Mamang* captures the deep spiritual connection of the Wirlomin people with the sea.

History Mystery Monday - in July

An interesting morning was enjoyed by all who attended, some twenty in number (a record attendance!) Our surprise author was Richard Goodwin talking about his new book *Sparks of Genius*. He was most entertaining and sold ten copies. The photographs capture some of the fun.



Visit to the Army Museum

Patrick Cornish



Jeanette Longwood, Helen Birch, Patrick Cornish and two other visitors.

The Tours and Events Committee is to be congratulated on arranging this July morning gathering — a thoroughly absorbing visit to the Army Museum in Fremantle which gave Society members insight into how well Australia has been served by those who donned khaki and answered the call. The museum on Cantonment Hill

pays homage to past campaigns, from the Boer War in 1899 to recent action in Afghanistan. There were lots of questions, some answers and visitors were left in awe at what's involved in defending territory and our way of life. Society Member Helen Birch, a stalwart among volunteers at the Museum, contributed interesting comments based on her experience. She and others are proud of the storage space on hand to house donated material, such as photographs, certificates and documents.



Irwin Districts Historical Society looks forward to welcoming everyone to the State History Conference, 6-8 September, at the Priory Hotel, Dongara.



William Criddle c1904



William Criddle's Dongara Hotel 1881



St Dominic's Priory 1904



Dominican Ladies' College 1950

Dongara buildings can talk - from hotel to priory to hotel

Nan Broad with Shirley Scotter, researcher extraordinaire, IDHS

In 1881 William Criddle, son of a stockman/farmer on the Greenough, built and operated a hotel at Dongara. William had farmed and then become a pastoralist on the West Gascoyne – lifestyles entirely divorced from that of a publican. The era still invited multiple occupations to those brave or foolhardy or desperate enough to try a new activity. Maybe Criddle desired a new life or he saw gain to be made from a pub in the right place.

Right place it was, situated beside the Irwin River on the main road into the port and emerging town of Dongara, some nine miles westward. All travellers came past the new 'Dongara Hotel', carting goods in and out to shipping and the flourmills, for business and for social and recreational purposes. In the 1880s only the 'Irwin Arms', a sly grog premises, traded on the north side of the river and private stills were secreted away for those in the know.

This attitude to liquor was a natural consequence of the population because, apart from the dominant businessmen and their families (predominately Methodist), the majority were workmen from the industrial areas of Britain – Manchester, the Clyde, Liverpool and the like. They lived by a different code to the agricultural labourers on the Greenough, holding a harder and untrusting attitude to their environment. Did Criddle, a good Anglican, hope to reform them as he kept a respectable business for all that he served liquor to the public?

The 'Dongara Hotel' offered accommodation and refreshment in the form of comfortable bedrooms, a good table, a bar and, most importantly, a commodious stable (the precursor to a parking area) where the conveyances of the travelling public were housed and their horses stalled, watered, fed and groomed. Advertisements emphasised the person of 'a sober ostler' on the premises at all times, no mean feat in that situation. Similar to other hoteliers, Criddle purchased ladies' haberdashery, household goods and possibly clothing from ships entering port and on-sold these at the hotel.

Entertainment included sports days with feats of strength (carrying bags of wheat), foot races, boxing, weightlifting and horseracing.

The sports on New Year's Day were a decided success. The Dongara Hotel was gaily decorated with flags as well as on the flat on which the sports were held. Mine host Criddle gave a sumptuous spread in the evening ... a dance was given to the remaining guests, which kept up with spirit till the hour of closing ... the much talked about kangaroo hunt came off and some gentlemen came off also, at a blind ravine. The sport was splendid, dog, horses and riders one and all excelling themselves including the lady riders. [*Victoria Express*, 30 Jan 1884]

The Dongara Races of 1883; The Maiden Plate, £11.6s, 1½ miles; Farmers' Stakes, £9, 2 miles; Publican's Purse, £9.10s, 1½ miles; and the Dongara Cup, £15, 3 miles. [*Victoria Express*, 11 Apr 1883]



Prioory Hotel

In 1900, after twenty years of this strenuous calling, the hotel was sold to an order of Dominican nuns from New Zealand, of all people. Bishop Kelly, the reigning prelate, organised the venture in his efforts to spread the word in WA, for the Dominicans were a teaching order. One can only imagine the effort that went into converting the hotel to a priory, which the body of nuns owned in their own right and named St Dominic's Priory. They took over the small existing school run by the Nairn sisters and held classes for boys and girls up to Leaving Standard. Many children from outlying areas boarded at the priory.

After twelve years a second storey was built above the old hotel. By then the priory had become an integral part of the Dongara community – a far cry from the early days of the port population. It took until 1930 for the nuns to

build the Dominican Ladies College and education proceeded for generations of local pupils until 1971 when a cyclone sent floodwaters coursing down the Irwin River, which overflowed and caused irreparable damage to the buildings. The nuns vacated the premises which was condemned, although the building still stood stolidly and housed men working on the Eneabba railway line, no doubt at their own peril.

In subsequent years several owners attempted to restore parts of the buildings with varying success. In 2023 the Groves family purchased the building. Kerry Groves supervised the restoration and renovation to the renamed 'Prioory Hotel' which offers accommodation, refreshment, conference facilities and community activities. The locals and ex-pupils, including Carmen Lawrence, watched the transformation as these buildings came back to life to welcome the public once more.

* * * * *

Mystery Photos: Katanning Firemen's Ball - 'A Brilliant Success'

Hilaire Natt, library volunteer

March issue of History West appealed for readers' assistance to find out more about these two mystery photographs. With the help of the West Australian newspaper's 'Can You Help?' column we have learnt a great deal more about the stories told in the images.



When the library sent this photograph to the 'Can You Help' column, it triggered numerous responses. Taking place in the Katanning Town Hall in May 1939, just before the outbreak of World War II, the Firemen's Ball, organised by the Katanning Volunteer Fire Brigade, was remembered by many as a glittering success.

It was described in vivid detail in the *Great Southern Herald* of Saturday 27 May 1939:

The interior of the hall was a maze of colour...the throng of 300 revellers found themselves beneath a canopy of coloured streamers and twinkling Japanese lanterns.

A highlight was the Queen Carnival Competition with six 'queens' competing, their votes recorded on a blackboard. The 'Queen Elect' (Sports Queen Janet Lang) clad in ermine, was announced with 'a fanfare of trumpets and escorted by a bodyguard of helmeted firemen'. The 'excellent sit-down dinner was a feature of the ball' and the writer also recorded the 'Frocking'

of all in attendance. (We thank Peter Schroy and Trove for this vivid account).

Susan Lang-Lemckert identified the woman in the centre front row, wearing a crown and robe, as her Dad's sister Janet Lang, 'Carnival Queen'. Susan suggested bringing her father, Roderic Joseph Lang, a sharp 93-year-old with a good memory for faces, along to the Society to view the original photograph. Rod had lived in Katanning until he was in his 20s and he recognised seated in the front row:

- 2nd from right – Herb Wanke, owner of the Radio Repair shop;
- 4th from right – Tommy Stayt, drummer in the band;
- Extreme right – Ivan Thomas;
- 2nd from left – Bill Fleay.

He also identified Janet Ellen and Joyce Mort, whose dad was a railway engine driver.

Diana Cavoli from Katanning, copied the article into the 'Lost Katanning' Facebook page and Vic Philpott replied identifying three people. Another respondent identified Janet Lang as her aunt.

The Football Team photograph



Barry Lewis thought it might be the East Perth "Juniors" Football Club (U/16, U/18, U/20) on a trip to the country before the "Colts" grade was introduced. He recognised the ties and blazers. Linda Edwards suggested it could be the Maylands RSL Football club with the initials SFC, but the jury is still out.

Many thanks to 'Can You Help', Rod and Susan, Diana and Peter and everyone who contacted the Society to help us discover more about the two photographs and the social history of Katanning.

Canvas Town, East Fremantle: WA's 19th century response to a housing crisis

Darren Foster

A housing shortage and skyrocketing rents are not new phenomena in Western Australia. In the mid-1890s, immigration saw the colony's population double in a few years, forcing many people to live in tents on the fringes of Fremantle and Perth. These communities lacked basic sanitation and created significant health and welfare risks for the inhabitants.

The lure of gold

Between 1894 and 1897, the peak years of immigration, WA's population doubled as migrants arrived to realise dreams of affluence in an economy fuelled by gold. Many of the migrants who disembarked from their sailing ships at the bustling port of Fremantle never made the final leg of their journey to the goldfields, Fremantle's population jumping from 5,607 in 1891 to 13,000 in 1896.

For Fremantle this influx generated a demand for accommodation far exceeding supply and imposed considerable pressure on the rudimentary social infrastructure. The Local Board of Health, chaired by Mayor Elias Solomon, grappled with the need to provide efficient sanitary, wastewater and rubbish disposal. Its challenges included the establishment of tent communities, nightmen who neglected their duties, the introduction of diseases to the local population by migrants and the proximity of noxious industries to living areas.

Hundreds of people lived in squalid conditions in a tent community known as 'Canvas Town' which formed on the eastern fringe of Fremantle, beyond Monument Hill, in the mid-1890s. This tent community lacked running water and any sanitation. On 19 March 1896 residents of the tents petitioned the Board of Health to 'assist in carrying out sanitary arrangements' which the Board declined, recording its opinion that 'if the tent holders were uncleanly, they should be removed'.

Among the residents of Canvas Town were Frederick and Florence Bamkin and their children, who migrated from Victoria. Florence Bamkin gave birth to her son George in a tent on a searing summer's day in February 1898. Ninety years later George Bamkin recalled his family's experiences:

...my father used to cart water by yoke with two kerosene tins of water from Stotter's (well), the place in High Street....As I grew up I used to go out with my father, I used to carry a little billy can of water home...he used to have to pay sixpence for those two kerosene tins full of water...8 gallons of water.

A photograph of the Bamkins and some of their tent neighbours in the late 1890s shows a large, weather-worn canvas tent surrounded by necessities, such as firewood and a kerosene tin to cart water, as well as a horse and a pet dog. The Bamkins and their neighbours were all dressed in their Sunday best.



Bamkin family at Canvas Town circa 1897, no. 2158, Fremantle City Library Local History Collection

The Fremantle Municipal Council, irritated by the frequent reports of unsanitary conditions and outbreaks of disease, moved to dismantle the community. On 18 March 1897 the Board of Health considered a petition asking that eviction notices be rescinded. The matter was referred to the Mayor and Health Inspector, and it appears the tent community was temporarily reprieved.

The well used by Canvas Town residents was frequently contaminated, the Government Analyst in February 1898 'condemn[ing] the water for drinking purposes'. Not surprisingly, these residents featured prominently in the Health Officer Dr Hope's regular reports on the diseases and ailments sweeping Fremantle: typhoid, scarlet fever, diphtheria, measles, low fever, chicken pox, influenza and colic as well as conjunctivitis, which was common in children. To compound the

poor living conditions, an investigation undertaken by the Government Analyst found that many of the local milk suppliers were guilty of watering down their milk, reducing its nutritional value to children and infants. This prompted the local Health Officer to note that 'inferior milk has been largely responsible for the mortality among infants'.

For many residents, alcohol became an escape from their desperation. This is evidenced by the Government Statistical Register which shows that in the period 1894 to 1898, the number of cases of drunkenness dealt with by the Magistrate's Courts peaked at 3,720 in 1897 and was more than double the number in 1894. Long-time Fremantle resident Stephen Jones recalled stories about the scene:

...some residents of the Town, ascending Ellen Street or High Street hill, were overcome by alcoholic languor and lay them down to rest by the wayside. They were 'rolled' as they slumbered.

The fate of single mothers and children was illustrated in an 1897 police case brought against a Canvas Town mother who used her tent for 'immoral purposes' and was 'addicted to drink': 'her two children had been left in an almost destitute condition for the last two days wandering about the streets having no place of shelter to go to'. The children were committed to an industrial school until they reached the age of sixteen.

By late 1898, Canvas Town had 108 married couples, 46 single men, and 296 children. However, under increasing pressure from the municipal authorities to relocate to new blocks further afield, its population began to dwindle. In 1902, occupiers of remaining tenements were served with 30-day notices to quit. In October 1902, two residents who failed to comply were fined and ordered to leave within 48 hours.

While the existence of tent communities from the mid-1890s aggravated local authorities, their existence and the public health and child welfare risks they posed spurred the development of water supplies, sanitation services, new housing land and schools.

References

Fremantle City Library Local History Collection
Minutes of the Fremantle Local Board of Health, 1896 - 1899
Oral histories — Graham Smeaton, George Bamkin
Newspapers — *West Australian*, *Umpire*

from Ship to Shore

The McKenzie family

Bruce Hoar



This octant was passed down through the McKenzie family and is currently on display at the Society's museum. It is a navigational instrument invented in the 1730s and used to measure the altitude (height above the horizon) of the sun or other celestial bodies, such as a prominent star at night. Its maker is named as 'Parnell: London', a firm which made instruments between 1768 and 1811. It is also engraved with the owner's name 'H McKenzie' who most likely was Capt. Hugh McKenzie Snr who handed the instrument to his son Hugh Jnr.

The McKenzies were one of the early colonial families of Albany, contributing much to the town for over a century. They originated in Scotland before moving to New Brunswick on Canada's east coast in 1826. There they started farming but soon moved into the maritime trades, including whaling, and in 1839 built a 121-ton brig they named *Brothers*.

In 1840 Capt. Hugh McKenzie Snr (1766-1841), intending to migrate to New Zealand, packed up his family, including sons Hugh Jnr, Kenneth and Edward and their families, and sailed the *Brothers* across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. As they approached Albany late in 1840, Capt. McKenzie Snr became seriously ill and, after landing in

Albany, died soon afterwards. Some of Capt. McKenzie's family stayed on in Albany, notably his son Hugh McKenzie Jnr (1804-1854) and wife Isabella and, at that time, their six children.

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The other two sons, Edward and Kenneth, sailed on to Hobart. Hugh Jnr sold his share in the brig to his brothers and they proceeded to trade along the east coast of Australia and as far afield as New Zealand, Singapore and India. Kenneth disappeared at sea in the Bass Strait in 1844 at which time Edward sold the *Brothers*. Edward went on to captain ships across the Pacific and eventually married and settled in California. He died in 1854.

Meanwhile back in Albany, Hugh McKenzie Jnr and family started their new life. At that time, Albany had a colonial population of fewer than 200, with approximately 50 houses and four hotels. It was the busiest port in the colony with more than 34 ships visiting in 1840, many of them American whalers.

Hugh purchased a cottage for his family, then first leased the *Digory Geake's Tavern* and then, in 1843, leased the *Ship Inn*, which was well located at the end of the main Albany jetty. With his previous experience in Canada, Hugh also became involved in the local whaling industry, developing a business supplying the industry and in 1843 was granted a whale-slaughtering licence. He was appointed to the Town Improvement Committee in 1843.

Hugh and wife Isabelle went on to have a further four children, two of whom unfortunately died young. The Albany-born son Cuthbert and his older brother John also played an important role in Albany's history. Hugh died, aged 50, in 1854 and his wife Isabelle died in 1884 at the age of 76. Hugh's death marked a new phase in the lives of the McKenzie family.

John McKenzie (1840-1926), who had arrived in Albany as a baby, left school aged 14 and began work in the whaling industry where he remained for the next 22 years. After a work accident where he suffered a severe back injury, John retired from the sea. In the meantime he had bought the *Freemasons Hotel* in 1870 and was the driving force behind the establishment of the Masonic Albany Lodge. In the 1880s John was appointed a member of the Liquor Licensing Board and a steward and judge for the Albany Turf Club. In 1888 he was elected to the local Council and remained there for the next 17 years, becoming Mayor from 1891 to 1894. He was also gazetted as a Justice of the Peace in 1894. He continued with his many and varied businesses and community roles until his death in 1914.

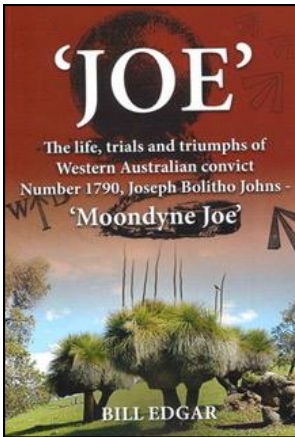
The life of John McKenzie's younger brother Cuthbert McKenzie (1851-1926) ran almost in parallel. He began as a whaler; then was the licensee of the family's *Freemason's Hotel*. He was elected to the Albany Council in 1888 and spent seven years as Mayor between 1898 and 1908, and was also a Justice of the Peace. Unlike John, Cuthbert moved into State politics and in 1910 was elected as the member for South East Province in the Legislative Council, serving two six-year terms. He died in 1926.

The McKenzies were a successful colonial family engaged in maritime industries – notably coastal trading and whaling – which they supplemented with inn-keeping. Their economic success led them into community service and local government. McKenzie House in Grey Street, overlooking Princess Royal Harbour, was the home of several generations of the family and stands as a reminder of their influence on the development of Albany.

Book Notes

Bill Edgar, 'Joe'. *The Life Trials and Triumphs of Western Australian Convict Number 1790 Joseph Bolitho Johns - Moondyne Joe*, Tammar Publications, 2022. In Library.

Patrick Cornish



Being sent across the world was a boon for some British miscreants; for others it was awful punishment. Author Bill Edgar has applied his attention to Joseph Bolitho Johns, prisoner number 1790, aka Moondyne Joe. Readers will learn plenty about not only him but also the Swan River Colony that was no paradise but was at least less polluted than many of the Old Country's urban slums.

The book is a faithful record of how people behaved and spoke. For example: “‘Hey there’, the guard snapped, ‘do yer want to reach Australia or don’t yer?....Get on with it then!’” After being transported, this prisoner was a dab hand at escaping custody but led a life of variable freedom and mixed success.

This chronicle covers the colony’s penal years, when sweat served to establish and civilise. You’ll find out how Moondyne Joe stayed the course until death.

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Barbara -15 Bulimba Rd, Nedlands”

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